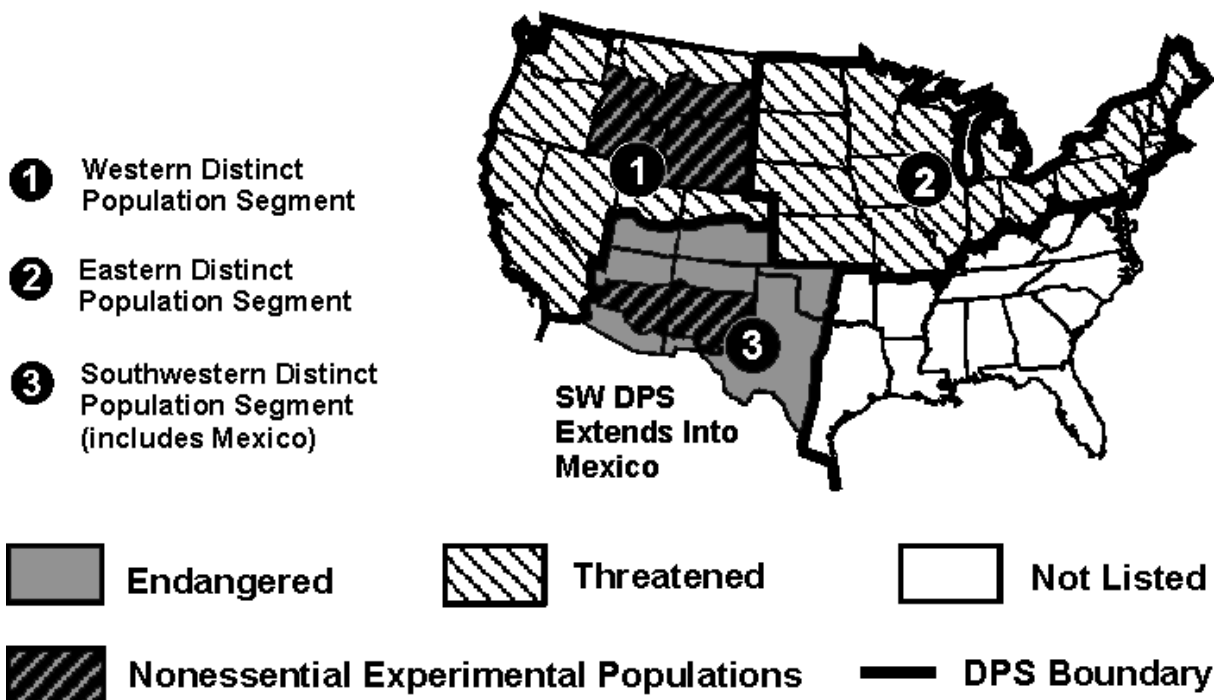




## Gray Wolf Eastern Distinct Population Segment

In 2003 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service changed the classification of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As a result of that change there are now three separate ESA listings for the species which correspond to three geographic areas in the lower 48 states where there are ongoing gray wolf recovery programs. In the eastern and western U.S., wolves were reclassified from endangered to threatened because wolf recovery programs are nearing their recovery goals. The definition of “threatened” is “likely to be on the brink of extinction in the foreseeable future,” and is a more appropriate classification than “endangered” because those recovery programs have succeeded in reducing threats to gray wolves and increasing their numbers and range in the eastern and western U.S. This change to “threatened” status allowed Federal protections to be relaxed in those areas. In the Southwest, where gray wolf recovery is in the early stages, wolves remain classified as endangered. “Endangered” means they are on the brink of extinction.

To reclassify wolves in the eastern and western U.S. from endangered to threatened we listed the geographic areas where there are ongoing gray wolf recovery programs as Distinct Population Segments (DPS). The map below shows the areas included in the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS, the Western Gray Wolf DPS, and the Southwestern Gray Wolf DPS, where the gray wolf continues to be listed as endangered.



### **Eastern Distinct Population Segment**

A Distinct Population Segment is one of several ways we can list animals as threatened or endangered. Under the ESA, the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS is treated like a species that is listed. A DPS listing differs from a species listing only in that it is usually described geographically rather than biologically. The Eastern DPS is made up of 21 states in the North Central and Northeastern U.S.

### **Recovery Actions in the Eastern Distinct Population Segment**

A Distinct Population Segment is a listed entity, like a species or subspecies listing; it is not a recovery program. The recovery program for gray wolves in the eastern United States has been directed by the Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf (Plan), which was prepared in 1978 and revised in 1992. The listing of the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS will not change the scope of that ongoing recovery program, and that Plan will continue to guide our wolf recovery efforts. Our recovery goal for restoring gray wolves in the eastern U.S. is being achieved by the expanding wolf populations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. At this time, we have no plans to restore gray wolves elsewhere in the Eastern United States. There is, however, a separate recovery program for the red wolf – another species of wolf – in the southeastern U.S. The red wolf recovery program is not within the area of the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS.

Because there is no firm evidence that a wolf population exists in the northeastern U.S., we cannot list that geographic area as a separate DPS. Instead, the Northeast is part of the Eastern DPS. Additionally, there is conflicting scientific evidence regarding the wolf species that historically lived in the northeastern states. Until we know which species of wolf occurred there, we cannot take any additional steps in planning wolf recovery in the Northeast. When the identity of the historical northeastern wolf has been determined, we will consider whether it warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act, and whether we should begin a Federal program to restore it.

### **Delisting the Gray Wolf in the Eastern DPS**

Now that gray wolves in the Eastern DPS have been reclassified from endangered to threatened, we will consider whether they should be delisted, that is, totally removed from the protections of the ESA. The purpose of the ESA is to avoid the extinction of species; it is not intended to provide routine long-term management and protection to species that are not imperiled. The ESA provides emergency treatment; when the emergency is over the species no longer needs ESA protection and should be delisted so we can focus our efforts on other imperiled species. We believe that gray wolves in the Eastern DPS may no longer need ESA protection. Gray wolf numbers have already exceeded the numerical goals of the Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf. We also need to evaluate the threats that will be faced by these gray wolves if Federal protection is removed. If we propose delisting the Eastern DPS, we will publicize the proposal, conduct public hearings, and open a lengthy public comment period before making a final decision. If the Eastern DPS is delisted, wolf protection and management would then be directed by State and Tribal wolf management plans and regulations.

Depending on the information that we have at that time about wolves in the Northeast, we will decide if those states should be included in a proposal to delist the gray wolf.

